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Representing **CALIFORNIA'S 39th** District

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Cisneros Supports the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020

I rise today to express my gratitude that the House has approved H.R. 2500, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020. The bill contains many much-needed and valuable provisions and I am proud to have had the opportunity to work with Chairman Smith as well as Democratic and Republican members of the Armed Services Committee to secure them. I urge these provisions to be maintained through the conference process.

H.R. 2500 is a boon for transition assistance that servicemembers rely upon when they leave the military. I am proud to have secured bipartisan language to assist active-duty reservists and national guardsmen, veterans, their dependents, and Gold Star families apply for and secure jobs in the civilian workforce. Specifically, the provision would help states across the nation expand or establish a pilot program to provide job placement assistance and related employment services to those servicemembers, veterans, and their families. As a veteran myself, I understand firsthand the challenges servicemembers, and their families, face when they enter the civilian workforce, and I am proud to have been able to secure provisions to assist these heroes as they transition to civilian life. Similarly, I am proud to have fought for and secured language calling on the Department of Defense to provide separating servicemembers with a comprehensive and individualized statement of benefits listing the benefits to which each servicemember is entitled and directing them to modernize the DD214 form that will facilitate better connectivity with veterans that have separated from the military. Additionally, at my request, H.R. 2500 requires the Department of Defense to review recent Transition Assistance Program reforms and provide a progress report on implementation to date. I look forward to receiving this report so that Congress may determine how to best improve upon the program and ensure our servicemembers are receiving the guidance and services they need to succeed when they transition to civilian life. Finally, I am pleased that H.R. 2500 includes language from my bill, H.R. 2944, the TALENT Act, which directs the Department of Defense to create a two-way exchange program between the Department's acquisition workforce and the private sector. The program will enable Department personnel, including military officers, to gain private sector experience and bring best practices they have learned back to the Department. Such a program brings benefits to the Department and to the individuals who may seek civilian employment after they conclude their military service.

Another area of importance I worked to address in H.R. 2500 is improving access to and outcomes in military health. I am proud to have secured language in the bill to extend and expand an ongoing pilot program jointly run with the U.S. Air Force and Department of Veterans Affairs under the Transition Assistance Program that educates transitioning servicewomen about women's health care at the VA and encourages female servicemembers to participate. Furthermore, I worked with the Armed Services Committee to include language in the bill to direct the Department of Defense to create a comprehensive policy for mental health care across several key elements: pain management, opioid addiction, suicide prevention, and post-traumatic stress disorder. I would also like to note that I worked with colleagues to respond to the disturbing reports of hazardous and unhealthy privatized military housing at installations across the nation. H.R. 2500 includes language to ensure safe privatized military housing through the creation of a tenant's bill of rights, prohibition on the use of non-disclosure agreements in connection with entering into, continuing, or terminating a lease for a housing unit, establishment of a dispute resolution process, and creation of an electronic work order system. Finally, I am also happy to state that my colleagues and I were also able to secure language in H.R. 2500 encouraging the Department of Defense to accelerate research and development into technology or equipment solutions to eliminate the need for open air burn pits and establish long-term solutions for toxic waste disposal.

As a Latino and former officer in the Navy, I am proud to have worked to secure language in H.R. 2500 that will improve diversity and inclusion in the Department of Defense. I know firsthand the benefits a diverse leadership can have on the force. Moreover, I believe a diverse military force reflects our values as a democratic society and provides the United States with a strategic advantage. To that end, I secured language in the bill to direct the Department of Defense to develop a new strategic plan for diversity and inclusion and worked with my colleagues to secure provisions to improve research capacity at Historic Black Colleges and Universities. Additionally, I was happy to support language during the Committee markup of H.R. 2500, under the leadership of Representative Jackie Speier, to require gender integration of Marine Corps basic training at Parris Island and San Diego. The Marine Corps is the only remaining military service that does not integrate basic training and it is time the Corps caught up to the other services in this regard. Finally, this bill includes an amendment - offered by myself and several colleagues and adopted on the House floor - to require that qualifications for eligibility to serve in an armed force account only for the ability of an individual to meet gender-neutral occupational standards and not include any criteria relating to the race, color, national origin, religion, or sex (including gender identity or sexual orientation) of an individual. We cannot stand for bans on individuals, including transgender individuals, serving in the armed forces purely because of who they are.

I also worked to ensure H.R. 2500 includes provisions to address sexual assault in the military. I was troubled to learn of the findings in 2018 Department of Defense annual report on sexual assault in the military. According to the report, 20,500 service members - 13,000 women and 7,500 men - across the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force and the National Guard experienced "contact or penetrative sexual assault" while serving in the military in 2018 - an increase from 14,900 in 2016. That is simply unacceptable. I am proud to have secured language in H.R. 2500 that extends the Defense Advisory Committee on Investigation, Prosecution, and Defense of Sexual Assault (DAC-IPAD) for an additional 5 years and expands its mandate to cover restorative justice models and interpretation of the Rules for Courts-Martial 1001(c) that affect sexual assault survivors. I also fought for and passed a provision to direct the Department of Defense to provide

a report on how the Department can establish a clear standard for victims and victims' counsel to have access to all nonprivileged court filings and related materials derived directly from and pertaining directly to the victim such that victims' rights can be enforced. Additionally, I am proud to have sought language to address the issue of protective orders – the FY 2020 NDAA now requires unit commanders to notify civilian authorities of the issuance of a military protective order against a member of the Armed Forces and would require unit commanders to notify a receiving unit of the issuance of a military protective order in the event a member is transferred to another unit. And I am happy to have helped secure language to create the new Defense Advisory Committee for the Prevention of Sexual Misconduct and I cosponsored an adopted amendment that prohibits the Department of Defense from contracting with companies that do not have a sexual harassment policy that penalizes instances of sexual harassment.

Another key challenge H.R. 2500 tackles is climate change. I am grateful that language I requested to have the Department of Defense explore the possibility of maintaining plug-in hybrid and electric government vehicle fleet on defense installations and building a microgrid infrastructure to support them was included in the bill. The Department of Defense must do its part to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and this language moves the Department in that direction. I am also pleased that the bill includes provisions to require all proposals for military construction projects to consider long-term changes in environmental conditions, mandate the Department of Defense to report on progress towards meeting the goal of 25% renewable energy for military facilities by 2025, and direct the Secretary of Defense to develop a climate vulnerability and risk assessment tool.

Puerto Rico recently felt the impact of climate change's most severe forces in Hurricane Maria, and I am proud to have cosponsored language led by Representative Nydia Velázquez that was included in H.R. 2500 that will support Puerto Rico's recovery by increasing the value of Puerto Rican subcontractors in the federal government's contracting goal. Increasing the value of Puerto Rican subcontractors will incentivize the contracting and subcontracting of Puerto Rican businesses – supporting the Puerto Rican economy and business as it recovers from Hurricane Maria.

H.R. 2500 also includes language to help shape a foreign policy that is consistent with American values. I was happy to work with my colleagues to increase oversight and transparency of civilian casualties resulting from strikes outside areas of active hostilities and direct the Department of Defense to work with a federally funded research and development center to conduct an independent assessment of processes and procedures related to civilian casualties. Additionally, I was proud to co-sponsor adopted amendments that tackled priority foreign policy challenges that our nation faces. These amendments reasserted congressional authority to authorize the use of force, including vis-à-vis Iran, and called for an end of war declaration and peace agreement that will formally and responsibly end the Korean war.

I would also like to note that the FY 2020 NDAA includes important education related provisions. I am grateful to see the amendment I cosponsored with several of my colleagues to enable the Secretary of Defense to make grants to Department of Defense schools or those with Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps programs to support world language study was included in the bill. I am also proud to have secured language in the bill to direct the Secretary of Defense to

explore how the Department may carry out a program under which the Secretary makes grants, on a competitive basis, to eligible entities to carry out STEM educational events for military communities across the United States.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, H.R. 2500 is a strong defense bill that supports our troops, protects our nation, and reflects American values. I was proud to vote in favor of this bill and encourage my colleagues in the House and Senate to maintain these important provisions through the conference process.